



Provide frequent, positive feedback and support.

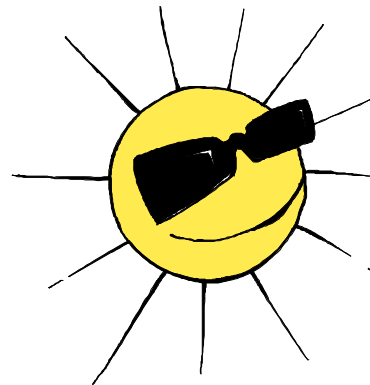
Becoming aware of the dynamics of feedback can change your whole counseling style!

Positive feedback to participants can have a wonderful influence on your sessions because people open up to positive feedback and support.

It is a win-win situation on both sides because as participants get more out of their sessions with you, you get feedback that you have really helped. This positive feedback is vital to your satisfaction with your work.

There are many ways to provide participants with frequent, positive feedback. Before we get into them, however, let's define feedback. Feedback is a lot more than just giving your opinion.

Giving feedback is the process of responding to messages after you have interpreted them for yourself.



When you are talking face-to-face with someone, your reactions to the other's message, **verbal or non-verbal**, are feedback. Your agreement, surprise, concern, aggravation,

sympathy, support, curiosity--or whatever--is all feedback. Their reaction to you--interest, agreement, disagreement, disbelief, fascination, impatience, or whatever--is feedback. Feedback is a two-way street. Feedback is the main thing that makes two-way communication different than one-way communication. It makes you different than a video!

Conversations shift, based on mutual feedback. Participants respond, explore options, or choose to remain silent, based on **our** feedback. We feel like we helped or we feel like we had no effect, based on **their** feedback.

In addition, feedback is an essential component of progressive learning. We need feedback to know how we're doing. We need to feel success at one thing before we have the confidence to tackle the next thing.

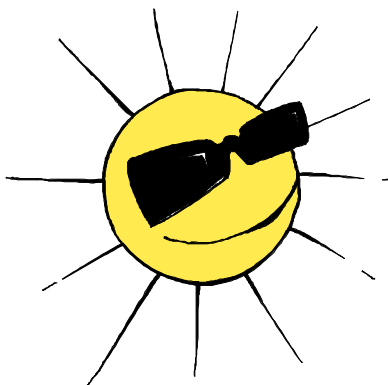
We give participants feedback constantly in our sessions but we're so accustomed to giving and receiving feedback that we scarcely notice it.

Although we are aware that different things affect the quality of the session, we don't usually stop to analyze what happened. If we feel like nothing much happened, we figure we just didn't hit it off or they weren't interested, and we move on. If we could

Look for a Sign!

Look for small signs of progress at each visit and reinforce them. Don't wait until things are resolved.

When a hemoglobin has improved slightly or excessive weight gain has slowed down a little, remark on how good that progress is.



analyze those sessions that don't go well, though, we would often find that how the session went was determined by the particular verbal and nonverbal feedback both parties provided!

Also, unless we allow for and notice feedback, distortions can occur in communication. We can go down the wrong path, we can lose people's interest, we can fail to connect with their real needs.

Some nutrition educators have a tendency to go into a monologue, where they go on for whole minutes, doing all the talking, concentrating on their message, and not attending to or encouraging feedback. They are losing one of the big benefits of feedback: a feeling on both sides of mutual communication.

If both sides don't feel like communication really happened, then it didn't!

The participant is going to leave wishing she didn't have to pay so dearly for those checks (by sitting through nutrition education) and the nutrition educator is going to be very frustrated and drained at the end of the day.

Are any of our messages so important that we should

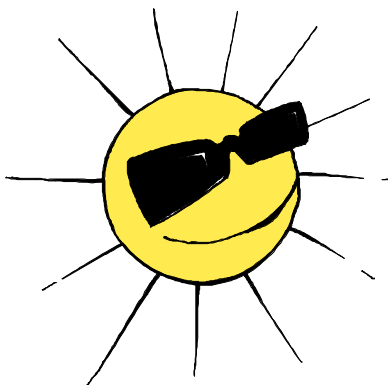
neglect true communication in order to present them? Probably not. If you notice a tendency in yourself to concentrate on the message to the exclusion of feedback and real communication, this could be an area for you to work on.

Now let's talk about ways we can provide participants with frequent, positive feedback and support without working any harder than we already do!

- **Give verbal and non-verbal feedback that you are really listening when people talk!** If you are half-listening but also thinking about what you're going to say next, it's going to show. Really listen. Be there! Send messages that you're there--have eye contact, nod your head, murmur "Yes . . .," and **look** like you are interested.

That sounds so obvious but it needs to be said; providing a clear visual and audible message that "Yes, I am listening" is a big boon to communication.

Our brains work a lot faster than people talk, so we can listen and go through the chart at the same time, but it is important to be **perceived** as listening!



"Be generous with praise but cautious with criticism."

The Ten Commandments of Helping People
The Sparks Center, University of Alabama at Birmingham

- **Look for small signs of improvement at each visit and reinforce them!** Don't wait until everything is resolved. By giving small bits of encouragement and praise, you may help them become resolved.

People want to be good parents and yet it can be hard even under relatively good circumstances to feel like you're doing a good job. It helps to have a little boost along the way, somebody who tells you that you're doing something right.

Comment positively when a child is drinking more milk, inadequate weight gain has improved a little, or mom has succeeded in one small area.

For example, if a pregnant woman mentions she has cut back on smoking, be enthusiastic and leave no doubt that you admire her for making this effort! Don't immediately push her to quit. You **must** give her positive feedback on cutting back if you want her to listen when you advance the idea that she should quit smoking completely.

- **Then there's the flipside: criticism. Criticism is very counterproductive in nutrition education.** Do you know someone who fusses at

participants and then fuss-es more after they leave, because she's upset that the participants didn't listen to a thing she said or the client is always late? This person hasn't learned other, more effective ways of communicating and is ignoring the feedback she gets from participants!

The person fussing is probably very well-intentioned, but **fussing won't result in positive behavior change.**

In fact, it's the people we are tempted to fuss at who most need to be brought along slowly, with all the loving kindness we can muster. We should take our concern for the children, which is probably what makes us feel compelled to fuss, and turn it into something more positive that can truly help the parent do better. Yes, it's a challenge, but it's much more effective.

- **Encourage the idea of wellness and a healthy lifestyle!** We are nutrition educators but let's not forget to give all the positive feedback we can about general concepts of healthful living. There are lots of little messages moms give us to tell us how they care about their children.

We have to respect this almost awesome element of counseling:

Words retain much of their magical power; they make things take on a new reality. Through feedback, people can leave our sessions a little different than when they came in.

We need to notice and give feedback when a mom tells us she got a car seat or she is careful to buckle her child up every time she gets in the car or whatever it is. She mentions these things for a reason and if we want to be really effective, we should give her feedback. Our feedback says "I notice. I hear what you're saying. I can see you are working on many fronts to keep your family healthy and happy."

- **Positive feedback can be about little things like being on time for an appointment and bringing all the necessary paperwork to clinic.**

Feedback that started the minute the participant walked up to the front counter affects how people feel when they get to us. A staff member of the Worcester, Mass. WIC Program suggests that complimenting a participant for bringing all her paperwork sets a good tone for the whole visit. We want people to play by our rules, so when they do, we should let them know we noticed.

Feedback like this is very reinforcing, too; the chances of the participant bringing all her paperwork next time is enhanced.

"Words and magic were in the beginning one and the same thing, and even today words retain much of their magical power."

Freud said that once and he's right.

Sometimes when we put things into words, they take on a new reality, like that first time two people say, "I love you."

It happens in clinic, too. Mothers may talk to you about things they don't normally talk about and tell you things that are very personal. Just the act of talking things through helps people make connections and see things clearly. Insights seem to come out of nowhere.

Hearing your feedback, your paraphrase of what they are telling you, or just seeing your reassuring look can really help people begin to solve problems for themselves.

ACTIVITIES to do before Discussion

Provide each person with frequent, positive feedback and support

The focus of these Activities is to help you get in the habit of giving frequent, positive feedback and support as a routine part of your sessions.

1. ***Don't you marvel sometimes at how people can come back to clinic in 6 months and repeat something nice you said, some little thing?*** It stuck! Perhaps this is sometimes because we may represent the bigger culture to people, a culture they may feel isolated from. We may represent the middle-class to them or somebody who "has it made." Our positive feedback or our little compliment may go beyond just something casually said. It may become a cultural affirmation. Do you think this could be? Do you have any examples of this from your work that you could share with your supervisor or in a staff discussion group?
2. ***You operate in this particular "sphere of influence" with people.*** Are you taking advantage of this potential influence and linking nutrition with overall health? Are you promoting wellness in general or are you limiting your view to iron-rich foods and when to start cereal? Expand your view! Link wellness and health with nutrition. Make yourself a powerful force for health promotion! You could get a lot more satisfaction out of seeing yourself with a broader mission. Go to the library and get out "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," by Stephen Covey and inspire yourself to see your sphere of influence in bigger terms! Your capacity to make a difference could be a lot bigger than you think.
3. ***Start looking for ways to support positive parenting!*** Feeding children involves so many different parenting skills and we are often explaining that what children are going through are typical and predictable stages. Beyond that, what other things can we do? How can we reinforce positive parenting as we watch moms deal with their children in the clinic? Can't we say more things that make them feel like they're doing a good job? We can help support parents. Think about it! Make notes of two occasions when you were able to support positive parenting.
4. ***Concentrate on sending the message "I am listening."*** Experiment with it. Try different nonverbal ways to sending the message. What do you notice? Try this at home with your kids, too. We talk at the rate of about 125 words per minute and can listen at the rate of 400 words per minute, so we try to listen and do other things, too. Focus on sending the message that you are listening and watch for subtle, positive changes.
5. ***Fussing: Do you do it!*** Think about how it wears you out because you get nowhere. Try some new tactics and try to get in some new habits.
6. ***Copy this page, cut out this note, and put it up over your desk as a reminder:***

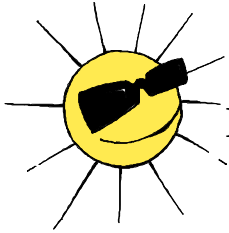
**Look for small signs of improvement
at each visit and reinforce them!**

These activities will help you get ready for the discussion. Complete the Activity Worksheet as you practice these activities.

Activity Worksheet
Bright Ideas - Unit 9

Name _____

Date _____



**Provide each person with frequent, positive feedback
and support**

How have you been able to link wellness and health issues with nutrition information and goals?

What parenting skills do you include with your nutrition education and goals? How do you reinforce positive parenting during the WIC visit?

Describe three ways you have found to reinforce even small signs of improvement for certain WIC clients:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What experience have you had when you tried to concentrate on "I am listening" instead of doing other things while the client is talking?

List three situations when it's easy to feel like "fussing" at the client: (Example: late for appointments)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Describe a more positive way of dealing with each one of the above situations:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Discuss these ideas with your supervisor or in a staff discussion group. These activity pages and a discussion are to be done for completion of this unit.